

“In Everything”
Psalm 75; Leviticus 19:10-18;
Romans 2:1-8; Matthew 7:1-12

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Over the last couple of weeks, as we have walked through the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught us some particular ways of being in relationship with God: giving, praying, fasting – some spiritual disciplines. Then, he started talking about what got in the way. Last week, he said, “Don’t worry.” It felt like what he was saying was that I have stuff going on inside that was going to get in the way. It was about who I am, and what I think, and what I do. This week he begins by saying, “Don’t judge.” He’s turning from the internal stuff that’s going on to what I’m doing with other folks, external. When he says, “Don’t judge,” he’s beginning to talk about my relationship with others. What are some of the concerns that might happen with that?

What does it mean when Jesus says, “Don’t judge.”? Does he mean we can’t make any discernments? We can’t determine what’s right and wrong? We can’t try to figure things out? I don’t think so. I don’t think that’s what he means by “don’t judge.” But I do think what he’s saying is that instead of just disagreeing with someone, we judge them; we change the nature of our relationship. If we’re both standing on level ground and having a disagreement, we can say things to each other as equals. But if we take a step up and look down on the other, it’s no longer a disagreement. Now we’re judging.

I think what Jesus is suggesting is that it’s really easy for us to begin, as we look at the other, to make them so “other” that they’re not like us. Judging somehow assumes they are less important. Or in some ways, it might be even the opposite; we make them so important that we don’t want to accept they could be wrong.

If you’re making a logical argument, there are some fallacies that you can get into. One of them is called a straw man. So when you set up the other person’s argument in a way that it makes it easier for you to refute it, you set it up in a way that’s not quite accurate to their real argument, then you are creating a straw man. The problem is that as we set up the other and their way of thinking as something we think we know, we can easily be defining their argument in a way that is pretty much a straw man. The other thing we do is to purposely set up the argument to be about the person and not the idea. That’s called ad hominem. They are pretty similar.

What I’m suggesting is that it’s easy to begin to do that with others. In an argument, you might do that to try to win an argument. It’s a fallacy, but it works sometimes. But sometimes I think we do that because we just don’t fully know the other’s argument. We don’t fully know them, so we make assumptions, we build up who that other person must be, and we begin, then, to deal with that other. We want that other to really work.

Jesus says, “Don’t judge.” Don’t begin to create and think you understand the other in a way that you either put them down or make them too important. Because when we do that, perhaps what we’re doing is putting a log in our own eye. We’re beginning to not

be able to fully see. It's so interesting to me that last week Jesus talked about how we perceive, and this week again he talks about how we perceive, how we see. How do we see the other? Do we think we know? Why is the other so important? Why do I need to take that speck out of somebody else's eye? Is it to help? Judgment doesn't often seem like helping. He says once we take the log out of our own eye, we can take the speck out of somebody else's eye. We can help. But there seems to be something about what Jesus is saying that we have some expectation of the other that becomes really important to me, and my perceptions might get in the way. So he begins by saying don't make the other greater or less. In some ways, I think he's asking us to keep the conversation with another person, not with a straw man. It's in recognizing the personhood of the other that we can stay in conversation.

I don't want to spend too much time on that, but it's just the beginning. Jesus does warn us that if we begin to take on this as a way we're going to define ourselves, the judgment we are going to put onto another is saying, "God, this is how we want you to treat us."

So he's beginning by saying we have to be careful with our relationship with others. We're going to build up expectations. We're going to deal with the other in ways that might not be so helpful. In fact, he goes on to say that the expectation you have is like you've found these wonderful things, things of great value, that you want to show someone else. What are your expectations when you show someone else something that you think is just wonderful—something you really value—and you want them to value it, too. If it's something you want to say, you want to be heard. It almost feels like he's saying you're going to be disappointed. You have these great pearls? They're going to get trampled. You have this great stuff you want to share? You're going to get attacked. I don't think he's trying to say that the other is a swine or a dog. The rest of the passage doesn't go there. I don't think that's what he's saying. I do think what he's saying is that the experience that we have of trying to share something extremely important to us with another can end up feeling like having ourselves trampled, mauled, or attacked.

So what does he do with this? It feels like he's basically saying we set up expectations about how we're supposed to get along, and we struggle with that and make judgments. We set up expectations of how people are supposed to respond to us, and we're going to be disappointed. What do we do? Part of the problem feels like we are looking to others for the things we should be looking to God for. We look to others for meaning. We look to others for purpose. We look to others to help us understand our gifts. It's not that that can't happen sometimes, but when we look there first, we're going to be disappointed.

So what does he say to do? He says to ask, search, and knock. He's talking about turning to God to ask, to search, and to knock. He's inviting us to recognize that we're going to come with all kinds of expectations for others and they're not going to be able to live up because they are not God. He's suggesting that we might want to take a step back and remember that just as we need God's grace, we need God's grace in our

relationships. We need to try to stay on par with one another and look at each other as human beings, and not expect anyone to be perfect. Then we need to turn to God and let God lead us on this wonderful journey. We need to ask, and begin to get some directions. Then go seeking, follow those directions. And then, if we find that there's a door, that we've arrived somewhere, not to turn around and go back, but to knock on it and enter in.

It feels to me that oftentimes I think I want to arrive at a particular place and then I want things to work out. I want everything to fit into that orbit. It feels to me like what he's saying is to let go of thinking you're going to arrive and that everybody else is going to fit the way you want them to fit, and you're going to experience from them always what you want of them. Instead, turn to God and go on this journey. Ask, search, knock. My guess is that when we get through that door, it's not the last door. We get to start again and go on another adventure.

Along the way, how do we deal with those people in our lives? How do we deal with our relationships? Well, in everything, do to others as you want them to do to you. In everything.

We usually tell people to never say never, or always. And here Jesus is saying always, in everything. I think that's incredible. What should we always bring with us? The thought that I'm going to try to do to others as I would have them do to me. I can take that into any and every situation. Jesus encourages us to do that. In everything.

If that's not enough of an incredible statement that Jesus is making, he then says this is the law and the prophets. God's taking us on a journey. We can turn to God, asking, searching, and knocking, and along the way God really wants us to try to get along. *This* is the law and the prophets, doing to others as we would have them do to us? I would never be so bold as to try to summarize the whole of the Old Testament in one statement. But it feels like this is what Jesus does.

We know that it is in the context of following him that he makes this statement. It is in the context of knowing the love and grace of God that he makes this statement. "In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you. This is the law and the prophets." Wow!

I wonder how many times during a week, when I'm in a situation wondering what I should do next, particularly in relationship to somebody else, particularly in relationship to somebody else who has not done what I would like to have done to me, I actually think about trying to do to them what I would want them to do to me. It's hard to take that step back because it feels like I want to do the opposite. They did that to me, so I can do it to them. That's not what Jesus says. He says, "In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you. This is the law and the prophets." Wow. Amen.

Let's pray:

Lord, help us to realize that when we begin to deal with other people we do all kinds of things. We begin to make assumptions. We begin to judge in ways that allow us to set them aside or put them down or pigeonhole them. Sometimes we do that so that we can end up not having to pay attention to or deal with them. We don't want that to happen to us. We don't want you to not pay attention to us. Help us not do that to others. Help us recognize we're human; we're going to disappoint one another. But we can always turn to you. Help us continue to ask, search, and knock and realize that you'll continue to take us on a journey that takes us further into life, and helps us experience and realize the wonder of your love ever more fully. Along the way, Lord, help us be good to one another, in everything to do to others as we would have them do to us, and recognize that that has your weight behind it. It's not always easy, Lord. Help us. Through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.